

Smoking-Histology Study

Editor, HOSPITAL TRIBUNE:

Having initiated the study of cigarette smoking and histologic morphology in patients with lung cancer reported in your issue of April 20, I regret the circumstances that resulted in the current publicity.

Your report was based on material presented at the recent meeting of the American Association of Pathologists and Bacteriologists by Dr. Raymond Yesner, who collaborated in this project and recorded many of the histologic findings. The results presented at that meeting were based on a preliminary analysis of the data, and they contain only Dr. Yesner's interpretations of those data.

The final report may show differences in the percentages because new statistical tabulations have been necessitated by a recent change in the criteria used for consolidation of histologic categories. Even if the percentages remain unchanged, however, I disagree with the interpretation that heavier smoking "caused" greater degrees of malignancy in lung cancer. The "base population" in this study consisted

not of a general group of smokers and nonsmokers but of people who already had lung cancer. Consequently, no causal inferences can be drawn about the role of smoking in creating either lung cancer or different cell types of cancer in a general population of smokers and nonsmokers. Furthermore, although increased rates of smoking were associated with increased rates of undifferentiated small cell cancers, such cancers were *not* found to be the most "malignant" tumors in the patients we studied.

My own interpretation of the preliminary data is that they contradict a long-standing belief about the pathogenesis of lung cancer. Although epidermoid carcinoma is generally regarded as exclusively a "cigarette smoker's cancer," four of the 42 people currently classified in our survey as having this type of cancer had *not* smoked cigarettes, and the rate of epidermoid carcinoma did *not* show an increase in association with increased amounts of smoking in the 449 patients we studied.

I am sorry if any of your readers assumed I had approved the contents of the report because my name was cited as a coauthor, and I urge them to await formal publication of the completed results before drawing any conclusions.

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